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A

HISTORICAL SERMON.

BY REV. A. M. STEWART,
PASTOR OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO, ILL.

"Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following."

CHICAGO, ILL.:
WHITMARSH & FULTON, BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS,
191 Lake Street, corner of Wells, (second story.)
1850.

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This discourse was delivered to the congregation in the ordinary course of pulpit duties, Sabbath, March the 10th, 1850. It was prepared for the benefit of the congregation, many of whom were not familiar with the history of our church and her distinctive principles, and is published by the request of a number who heard it.

It was the intention to have presented more fully some of our cherished and distinctive principles for which the Reformed Presbyterian Church has long earnestly contended—to notice some of the doctrines of grace, wherein it is believed there exists a material difference between ourselves and other respectable bodies of christians by whom we are surrounded. This, however, would have carried the discourse far beyond its first intention, and must therefore be reserved for another occasion, so soon as time can be commanded from other pressing duties.

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SERMON.

Jeremiah 6: 16. "Thus saith the Lord, 'Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.'"

History connects the present with the past, and enables us to profit by every advance man has made in his civil and ecclesiastical relations. No good accomplished has ever been finally lost. No right principle once developed has entirely disappeared. The province of history is to collect and arrange these; that, with the acquisitions of the past, joined to the energies of the present, civil society and especially the church of God may move confidently on to their high destiny. Nor is it without advantage to mark the errors and failures to which men have been subject, if by so doing we shall be better able to avoid the reefs on which they broke. Were history made more frequently the subject of pulpit exhibition, how different would be the interest and edification of the hearers to that produced by many of the shabby as well as tinselled modern productions. The most eloquent and instructive discourses on record consist of a simple narration of events. When Judah would interest the ruler of Egypt in behalf of the *lad*, his younger brother, his unvarnished rehearsal of facts has moved many an eye to tears. Paul's masterly defence before Agrippa was a recital of God's promises and dealings with His chosen Israel: and Stephen's dying eloquence—an historical discourse—silenced every argument of his opponents save that of violence.

The person whose province it is to write the rise, progress and fall of nations, and the changes which take place in civil society, performs an important office. But he who writes or speaks of the church, treads upon holy ground. If he does this to any purpose, he must get within the veil, where is exhibited man's moral nature—his spiritual being. Here motives for eternity have their dwelling. Here feelings and principles have had their lifespring which have moved the world, and wrought many of time's greatest changes. Briefly to exhibit these in a small department of Zion during a certain period, is my purpose at present. Not to exhume long-mooted and seemingly-forgotten questions,—not to stir up strife or challenge controversy,—but to justify ourselves, exhibit the truth, and vindicate the memory of eminent men too long villified.

Our situation as an infant congregation in this city is somewhat peculiar. The history of our church, her distinctive principles and practice, are but little known to the majority of this community. Considerable misapprehen-

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sion and prejudice exist, arising, we are confident, from the fact that these are not better known. Any existing productions calculated to afford this information are not available here in number sufficient for the purpose desired. While we hear it urged that our doctrines and practices were no doubt well enough two centuries since, but are unsuited to the wonderful advance of the nineteenth century, we are unwilling to be silent, having yet to learn that age, either in natural life or principle, is a fault. Theology may be old, but never antiquated. Could serious minded persons be induced to turn aside from the novelties in doctrine and follies in practice now unhappily occupying the attention of professing christians, and ask earnestly for *the old paths, where is the good way*, that they might walk therein, a revival of religion and prosperity to the Church speedily following, would compel every one to say, "The old is better." To aid in accomplishing this desirable end is my earnest wish. In doing this I will give a succint history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and, if time permit, intermingled with some of her distinctive principles. Thus endeavoring to edify the people God has committed to my care,—afford information to enquirers,—an opportunity to those who may retain any prejudice to have it removed,—and in this day of error and defection, as one hoping he stands by the command of God in *the way*, to urge all who hear to "*ask for the old paths, where is the good way*," that they may walk therein and find rest for their souls.

The Church in almost every land and during nearly every period has had some principle, developed by time or place, to characterize her. One great leading principle has marked the Reformed Presbyterian Church for the last three centuries. This doctrine she still considers her glory. For it she still contends. For its maintenance the blood of her choicest sons and daughters has often been poured out like water. By stating at the outset this leading feature—this polar star—much of her history in this and the old world may be better understood. It should be written in prominent characters on the doorposts of every legislative hall, and of every church court. "*The Lord Jesus Christ is the alone rightful ruler of the nations, and the only Head and King of his Church.*" We are not to be understood as asserting that other denominations have not and do not still believe this doctrine. They have, however, never given it that distinct prominence which has been done by our own. Any people who rightly understand this principle can never be slaves, either temporally or spiritually. It contains the essence of all true liberty. If a civil officer commands what is unlawful, with this charter to guide, the answer is easy—"We owe allegiance to a higher *Ruler*." Should ecclesiastic tyranny attempt to lord over God's heritage, the same answer is ready—"Jesus Christ is our only lawgiver—it is better to obey God than man." It was the legitimate working of this principle which caused our Church, fifty years ago, when all others were sleeping over the matter, entirely to exclude from her communion all slaveholders and their abettors, though quite a number of our congregations were then in the slave states. It was its magic influence

which carried the Covenanters, in the valleys and on the hills of Scotland, unsubdued, through many a fierce persecution. Its seeds remaining in the Church of Scotland, caused the various secessions for a century previous to 1843, and then the glorious outcoming and constitution of the Free Church.

We are not over anxious to trace back our history in a direct line to the Apostles. We are Presbyterians. Our belief is, "That the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer and Head of His Church, has appointed one permanent form of ecclesiastical government, and that this form is by divine right Presbyterian." We believe in a regular succession of the ministry,—that this succession, in spirit and in fact, since the days of the Apostles, has been by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery.

Christianity at an early period was introduced into Scotland—perhaps by one of the Apostles. Presbyterianism has ever been the form under which religion has developed itself there, when the people were left free to choose and act. The Scotch have ever been ardently attached to Presbytery. Neither revolution, power, or tyranny, has ever been able to introduce permanently any other form of church government. Shortly after the commencement of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, this feeling assumed a greater prominence, as Scotland soon took a high stand in maintaining the liberties of God's people from superstition and popish tyranny.

Impressed with the maxim, that "in union there is strength," the Scottish reformers early saw the importance of not only enlightened harmony and concerted action among themselves, but also earnestly sought a bond of universal brotherhood among the real followers of Christ in every land. Imitating the example of God's people in various periods of the church's history, in 1557 *as Christians* they entered into solemn covenant with God for furthering and maintaining scriptural religion, and against all that opposed itself to true godliness. Hence they soon became known by the name "Covenanters," given at first in reproach, but of which their descendants have much reason to be proud. Not only as members of His church did they desire to acknowledge Christ as their King, but also in a *civil capacity* publicly to own Him as the Prince of the kings of the earth. Accordingly, in 1581, as a nation Scotland entered into solemn covenant engagements, and as solemnly renewed them in 1638.

The struggle, which at this period was determinedly waged by Charles the First, on the one hand, for arbitrary power and royal supremacy, and on the other by a large portion of his subjects for liberty and freedom of conscience, united in close amity the followers of Christ in the three kingdoms. The famous Westminster Assembly, which met in 1643, was a consequence of this sympathy. The history and labors of this most learned Assembly of divines, is too well known to need repeating here. A "Confession of Faith," yet adhered to by all deserving the name of Presbyterians, both in this land and the British Isles, was one result of this Assembly; another, a solemn "League and Covenant" entered into by all classes in the three kingdoms,

for the maintenance of civil and ecclesiastical liberty, and the promotion of the true Reformed Religion—Calvanistic Presbyterianism.

The pleasing state of things, thus happily begun, was much disturbed during the civil war between the Parliament and the king, and the Protectorate of Cromwell, and completely overthrown during the inauspicious reign of Charles the Second. In 1660 he returned from exile, and took possession of the throne without giving any pledge of security for liberty of conscience or the rights of God's people. A storm of persecution soon burst upon the Covenanters of Scotland, equaling in ferocity the days of Nero. By a committee of Parliament, the first year of his reign, ministers were forbidden to meet together for the purpose of remonstrating, or seeking redress of grievances. This was speedily followed by an act of Parliament, declaring all the laws enacted within the preceding twenty-two years, for the advancement of religion and protection of God's people, null and void,—asserting the king's prerogative and supremacy over all persons and causes, civil and ecclesiastical.

Hundreds of godly pastors, who in vain attempted to remonstrate, were forcibly ejected from their congregations, and their means of sustenance cut off. The government, instigated by the prelates, determined, at all hazards, to have episcopacy established in Scotland, multiplied its acts of cruelty, till thousands, who in conscience could not yield, were made to seal their testimony with their blood. Yet, like Israel in Egypt, the more they were persecuted, the more they grew in strength and opposition. After nine years of fruitless endeavor to reduce to obedience or exterminate, the government changed its course from cruelty to craft. An act was emitted, designated, "An act of indulgence," granting to the exiled servants of God, under certain restrictions, in a measure destructive of ministerial freedom and faithfulness, to preach in vacant churches. Many were entrapped by this courtly bait. This was the germ of division among the Presbyterians of Scotland, leading eventually to the separate standing of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and, as will presently appear, shows them to be the direct representatives and descendants of the Covenanters. Many still refused to accept of this indulgence. After three years of further opposition a second indulgence was emitted, more cunningly framed, yet in reality as obnoxious as the first. This proved more successful. The great majority of ministers, who had thus far held out, submitted. A faithful remnant, however, still remained firm, and refused to betray a single prerogative of Prince Emanuel into the hands of a tyrannical government. Driven from the churches and the abodes of men, they assembled themselves in the fields, on the mountains, and in the glens, to worship untrammelled their covenant God.

These assemblies were styled by the government, "Conventicles." To blot out the memorial of these meetings from under heaven, the whole strength of the civil and prelatic power was exerted for fifteen years longer.

Still they existed. Amid all the strife of angry passion, free prayer and a pure gospel continued to be heard. Minister after minister, who dared to brave the rage of God's enemies, had his life violently shortened, till at length the last standard bearer, Donald Cargill, perished, while boldly unfurling the banner inscribed, "For Christ's Crown and Covenant." Nor did this destroy or break up the Conventicles. The persecuted remnant, without a pastor or spiritual guide, continued unawed to meet on the moor, among the rocks, and on the mountains, to sing and pray, to read the Bible, and mutually exhort each other to continue faithful till death.

Matters were in this condition, when the revolution of 1688 placed William and Mary on the throne of Britain, so long disgraced by the bloody house of Stuart. An immediate consequence was a cessation of the fierce persecution.

After the accumulated woes which, for more than a quarter of a century, had been heaped upon the Presbyterians, were removed, the calm which succeeded had no doubt a tendency to make honest men less watchful than under other circumstances they would have been. When shortly after it was proposed to make Presbyterianism the established religion of Scotland, almost the entire body of ministers and people readily consented. In their desire for this, they neglected to have a full understanding and premises carefully defined. The church is yet suffering the sad consequences of this haste. It was not, however, to be expected that the small but unsubdued band—men, who had for twenty-eight years endured a fiery ordeal without betraying a single prerogative of Christ, or one of His creature's rights; and who had thus been led to examine with the most searching scrutiny every principle of civil and ecclesiastical polity, would now join in so important an arrangement without caution and careful examination.

After mature deliberation they came to the conclusion that it was not their duty to join in the establishment, nor acknowledge as proper the revolution settlement—giving, among others, the following reasons: 1. Because the whole nation, England, Ireland and Scotland, had solemnly covenanted to be of one uniform religion; that these covenants still binding, were entirely overlooked in the new settlement; that a foreigner by birth, contrary to scripture direction (Deut. xvii. 15,) was called to the throne, who by a strange inconsistency approved of the establishment of Episcopacy in England and Presbyterianism in Scotland. 2. That many of the ministers and elders uniting in the establishment were of very exceptionable character, being justly chargeable with unfaithfulness to Christ, having violated their solemn vows—some even having joined in the persecution—and were nevertheless admitted without exhibiting any signs of repentance. 3. The revolution constitution and establishment seemed to be for mere political policy, without regard to having it built, where it should have been, "Upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." 4. That Erastianism was plainly mingled with the constitution of

the Church, inconsistent with her inherent rights. By this it was meant that the civil magistrate had by far too much authority—claiming and having conceded the right of naming the time and place where her General Assembly should be held—of sitting in it in person, or by commissioner—of dissolving its sittings at pleasure; and in various other ways infringing on the rights of the Church. 5. That at the settlement the subject of patronage was neither approved nor condemned, but reserved for future consideration, which was afterwards imposed, as a horrid incubus, on the Church of Scotland.

Since then more than a century and a half have intervened. Succeeding events have fully shown that those far-seeing men were right. Happy would it have been for the Church and kingdom of Scotland—for the cause of evangelical religion, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, had all her ministers and people in 1688 taken the same firm stand. Instead of six distinct Presbyterian bodies which now exist in Scotland, so far as we can judge, there need have been but one. Body after body of preachers and people have been compelled to secede, till the establishment has become like a lodge for a wayfaring man—having *Ichabod* written upon her lifeless fabric. In 1733 the Erskines and their adherents withdrew and constituted the Secession Church. In 1760 a number of ministers and their people left and formed the Relief Church. Among these bodies various changes, subdivisions and unions have since taken place. But in 1843 the grand Secession—the glorious outcoming happened, forming the Free Church.

Our hope and prayer is, that these various Secessions, and our own body in Scotland may soon be harmoniously blended into one. At this distance we are able to see but little to prevent it. They all subscribe the same Confession of faith—are Calvinistic Presbyterians, and a common grievance was the cause of their separation. Were such a union happily consummated, though much is now done for the cause of Christ in that small but interesting region, it would be increased ten fold—while one puts ten to flight, two would put a hundred.

But a few words more in reference to our Church in the old world. Various causes after the Revolution tended to hinder the full development of her principles, and a great increase of numbers. For the last century, however, her numbers and influence have been gradually increasing and extending themselves. In 1743 a Presbytery was organized under the appellation of "The Reformed Presbytery." Not because as a Church she had no previous existence, but by this name it was thought her previous and present standing, and well defined principles were better designated. By an increase of congregations and pastors, a Synod was constituted in 1810. About the same time also a sister Synod was constituted in the north of Ireland. At present, in both these localities she is respectable in numbers, commanding the respect of other bodies, exerting a salutary influence in the promotion of sound doctrine and true piety, and numbering among her ministers some of the most able and devoted of our time.

As a corroboration of these views and history, I quote a few sentences from Hetherington, the living historian of the Church of Scotland, who in his over-earnest zeal for the Establishment, will not be charged with partiality to the Covenanters. Speaking of them and their principles in the perilous times of 1680, he calls them "Those zealous opponents of all practical tyranny and lax submissiveness of principle"—"The strict Presbyterians, termed sometimes 'Cameronians,' and sometimes 'Society People.'" In 1682, after Cargill, their last minister, had suffered martyrdom, yet still maintaining their high and independent standing, he terms them "These fearless and high principled men." Speaking of their refusal to join in Argyle's rebellion in 1685, he says, "Their standing aloof, which was chiefly caused by their adherence to their own high principles." Writing in relation to the great body of ministers falling in with the various acts of governmental indulgence, and the Cameronians utterly refusing, he asserts, "The firm, unyielding Covenanters adopted a more consistent course." And of their history during all that trying period, "Any censure, therefore, which could justly be pronounced against them must be exceedingly slight, and, when compared with the vast debt of gratitude due to them from the entire empire, must become almost invisible, like a speck on the sun." After the Revolution, when the Establishment was agreed upon and entered into, he writes again, "The Cameronian Covenanters *alone* disdained to stoop to compromise or concealment, boldly avowed their principles, and loudly censured the church for want of faithfulness and zeal." Speaking of them at present, he says, "Unpropitious strifes and jarrings prevailed among them, fomented by a few men of greater zeal than knowledge or judgment, and prevented them from assuming, for many years, that united and harmonious aspect which could alone give them strength and importance in the community, *and which in later times they acquired and continue to display.*"

About the middle of the eighteenth century, families in connection with the Reformed Presbyterian Church from Scotland and Ireland began to emigrate to the western world, settling principally in the colonies of Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. These families, as might have been expected from their education, their careful instruction in doctrine and practice, carried their religion with them—a matter too sadly neglected in much of our modern emigration. Painfully realizing the want of public ordinances, such as they could unite in and approve, they sent back earnest requests to their fatherland for the church there to send out some ordained ministers to organize these scattered families into congregations, and administer to them the sealing ordinances. These requests were well received. Accordingly, a number of ministers were sent across the Atlantic at various times, whose missionary labors were blessed by the Head of the Church. The work so far progressed that in 1774 the Church was formally organized in America by the union of three ministers and elders constituting themselves

into a Presbytery. This took place in the then colony of Pennsylvania. Notwithstanding the distractions caused by a seven years' war, which immediately followed, the church thus organized was enabled to extend her boundaries and increase her influence.

In the year 1782 an event took place materially affecting the interests of the Church, for a better understanding of which, as well as other matters in connection with the history since, it will be necessary briefly to notice two other sister denominations. Shortly after the formation of the Associate Church in Scotland in 1733, families from her connection began to emigrate to the colonies. In 1754 a formal organization was effected in that connection. About the close of the Revolutionary War, in 1780, a union was proposed between the Reformed and Associate Presbyteries in this country, the friends of union supposing that the causes of disunion in the old world did not exist in sufficient force here to continue a separation. Accordingly, in 1782 a majority of both these bodies resolved to consummate this union, which was done by assuming the cognomen of both, "Associate," and "Reformed," calling the united body the "Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church." A minority, however, of each body could not in conscience enter into the union, but maintained and continued the old organizations. These three bodies still continue separate, though so near each other in doctrine, discipline, and practice, that the uninitiated are unable to discern the difference.

Since then they have all largely increased in members and usefulness. The Associate Reformed Church now consists of four Synods and several hundred ministers. The Associate Church has one Synod and between one and two hundred ministers. There are about a hundred ministers bearing the name of Reformed Presbyterians. There are also many vacant congregations ready for settlement. Near the beginning of the present century, a Theological Seminary was organized, and in 1810 a Synod constituted, holding its meetings annually.

About twenty years since, a considerable diversity of opinion began to exist among the ministers and people of our connection, chiefly with respect to the application of the Church's principles to the government of the United States—whether persons emigrating to this country ought to take the oath of allegiance—whether our members ought to vote, hold office, &c. Those with whom we sympathize, maintained the affirmative of these propositions. The continued agitation of these matters, without inducing agreement, caused a separation in 1832. This, like all other divisions in the Church of God, was wrong, and might have been prevented without the sacrifice of principle, had not the evil passions of both parties got the better of their christian judgment. It is, however, a great pleasure to know that the lovers of peace and unity of brethren in both sections, are mourning over the separation, and earnestly looking forward to a re-union of those who never should have been separated.

It also deserves notice, that propositions, delegations, and conventions, in reference to a union of the three bodies already mentioned, have been enter-

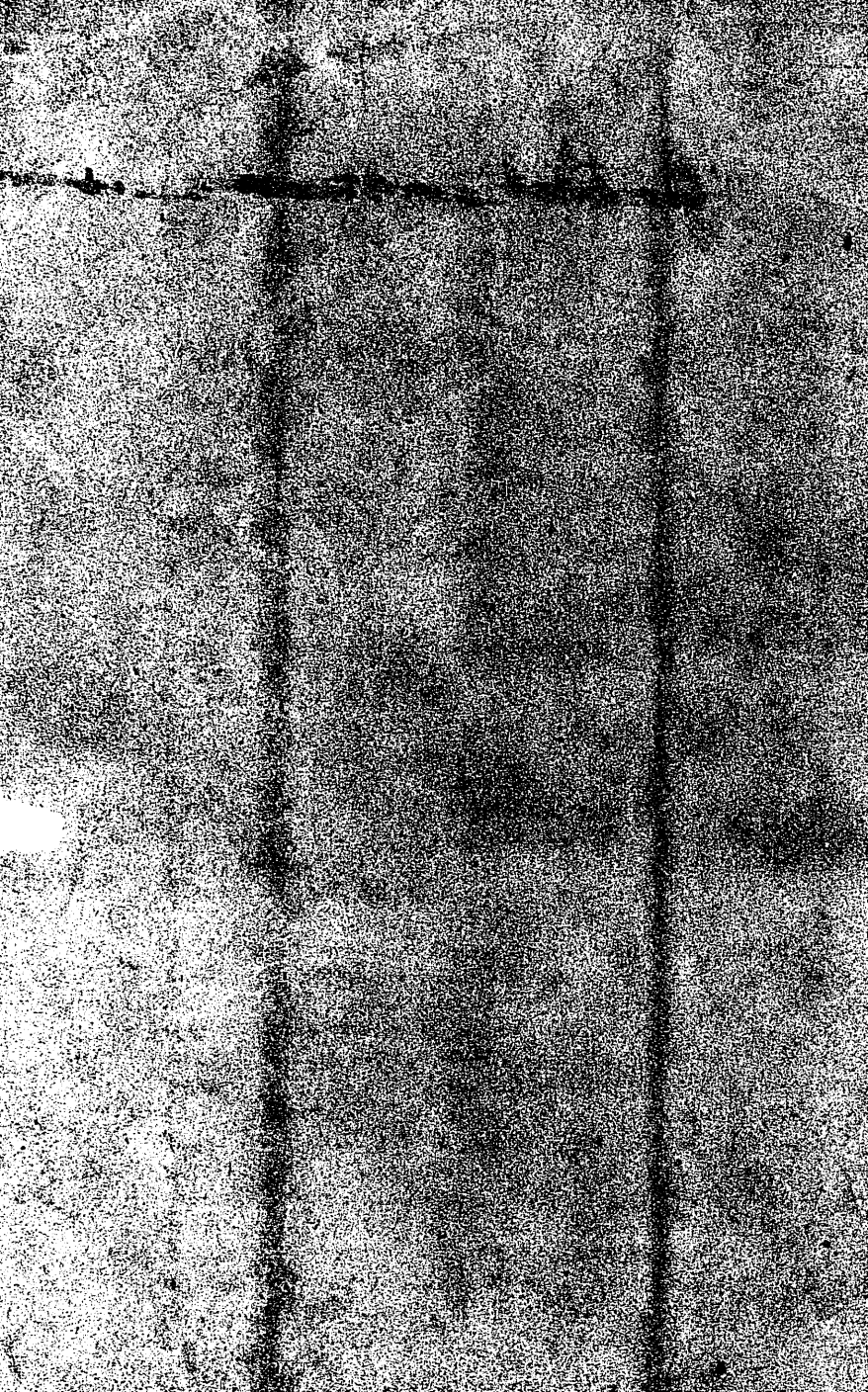
tained, appointed, and held for a number of years past with favorable results. And though an organic union has not yet been accomplished, still, from the growing interest and attachment of both pastors and people, we have reason to hope, that ere long we shall witness the goodly spectacle of a United Presbyterian Church, composed of these now separated bodies, maintaining in unimpaired integrity, the Westminister Confession of Faith, true Calvanistic Reformation Principles, Justification by faith in Christ, Sanctification, Election. Perseverance of the Saints, the threefold offices of Christ, the imputation of sin and righteousness, the necessity of good works as an evidence of an interest in the Atonement, the binding obligation of Covenants as well as the duty of entering into them on proper occasions in New Testament times, and a Scripture Psalmody. That this desirable object may be accomplished, each Reformed Presbyterian should in the meantime diligently cultivate his own vineyard, that others seeing their good works, may more earnestly desire a union with us.

Our Church is now in a very prosperous condition. The Synod which meets annually, is composed of six Presbyteries, which usually meet twice a year. One of these Presbyteries is located in Northern India, consisting of three ministers and their families, with a number of native assistants, all supported by the liberality of the brethren at home. We are not aware that any body so small as our own, supports so large a foreign mission. Nor is the Home mission forgotten. Here also a larger field, in proportion to the number of pastors, has been opened than in any other denomination. We have vacancies and preaching stations extending from Nova Scotia westward into Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, and Tennessee. Quite a number of these are able and anxious to support the gospel among themselves; a lack of ministers alone prevents their settlement. This, it is to be hoped, will soon be remedied. Under the care of Synod the Theological Seminary is still continued, and located in Philadelphia, Pa., where a number of young men are annually prepared, and go out to supply the growing wants of the church.

Five years since we had neither name nor member in this city or vicinity. The way has been opened up, and our condition to day attests what God has done for us. Persons from distant localities, and different ecclesiastic connections have united in our communion here. Others are enquiring. For their sake, as well as the edification of our own members, this brief sketch has been prepared. May the good Shepherd make it instrumental in directing many to the good old ways of Zion. We are not ignorant that the great scriptural principles for which our forefathers contended and suffered, were extremely unpopular with tyrannical states and loose thinking professors. Nor do we from the same sources expect a more favorable reception now. Still we revere their memory. Their eminent piety we wish to make our own. Their religious example we feel it our privilege as well as our duty to imitate. Their testimony for the truth we hope, by divine aid, to maintain inviolate. We do not imagine the time has fully come, when the principles

for which they contended are to be developed in all their beautiful proportions. But with the firm assurance that our Covenanter forefathers suffered for the cause of God, of conscience, and of liberty, we believe their principles will be embodied in the Millenial Church.

Brethren, cherishing a love to all other bodies of professing christians, we nevertheless cannot turn aside from the testimony our fathers raised for the truth, and left as a legacy for us to maintain, and to which we are solemnly pledged in covenant, to join in any connection, however respectable and numerous, where we believe error exists. May the Holy spirit, by his saving influence, enable you to walk worthy of your high vocation, to hold fast that which thou hast, to ask earnestly for the "old paths, where is the good way, and to walk therein, that you may find rest for your souls."



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